

PROPOSALS FOR PLU'S GENERAL EDUCATION PROGRAM – 1<sup>ST</sup> DRAFTS  
Who We Are and Where We Are  
December 7, 2007

Who We Are: The Principles of General Education and the Guidelines for a General Education Program at PLU communicate important aspects of who we are. Both of these documents were adopted by the faculty, draw extensively on the work of PLU 2000, PLU 2010, and the Integrated Learning Objectives (ILOs) and thus articulate our shared commitments to, and understandings of, general education at PLU. With the conversion of the International Core to the International Honors Program, we have further clarified what we hope to deliver to our students.

We are a faculty deeply and passionately engaged in our disciplines. This is an affirmation of our history, mission, and commitment to excellent scholarship and teaching. This commitment and orientation was also confirmed by the Faculty Assembly last May as the distributive and distributive with embedded themes approaches were selected for further development and consideration. The Ad Hoc Steering Committee on General Education has worked diligently in pursuing specific plans within these general approaches. In doing so, the committee has recognized some important and serious realities that have significantly and appropriately impacted the focus of our work.

As a community, we must develop a pan-university understanding of what makes a general education course a general education course. We need faculty development and overt conversation around the various pedagogical approaches employed by various disciplines and courses. We need a fuller understanding of Senior Seminars and how these critical experiences serve to pull together our students' entire education. We need to be respectful of how the implementation and administration of a program impact our resources.

In the process of uncovering, sharing, and seeking understanding around these types of issues, the committee has recognized untapped potential and undiscovered realities already present in our current GURs. General education needs ongoing and sustained attention. Much remains possible for a program with strong oversight and efforts at assessment that are supported by faculty development and that inform ongoing improvement and refinement. *General education matters* and cannot be viewed as an afterthought or seen as an obstacle to the real work of the major. Academic units must be able to articulate how minors and majors build on, are supported by, and interact with, general education at PLU. *This is where our energy needs to go for the next several years.*

Where We Are: This four-year process of examining general education at PLU has cultivated a stronger culture of conversation around general education. This is significant and meaningful in and of itself. The deep and passionate commitment we have for our disciplines has been reaffirmed through these conversations, and the examination of general education has not provided evidence to support major revision at this time. As stated above, this is a reflection of our history, mission, and commitment to excellent scholarship and teaching. To move us forward, however, the elements that currently comprise the GURs are for the first time presented as a cohesive program. Further, unit conversations about what fulfills a GUR and university-wide discussion of such matters are now underway. Having clearly articulated a program of general education we will be able to do better assessment. The development of our university wide assessment plans will also provide information useful to ongoing review and strengthening of general education at PLU.

## Attachment A

First, however, we must make the move to think of general education as a program, advise it as a program, and teach the courses as if they were part of a program. Once this effort has begun in earnest, we can begin to assess how well we are doing what we say we do. Any future changes to the program must flow naturally from regular review and modification. Therefore, the committee will not be offering major changes to the elements that comprise the current GURs. While this could be considered by some a failure of the charge to reform general education, we must recognize that this is the organic outcome of a deliberate and meaningful process. *Our time and energy should first go to transforming our thinking about general education and to developing our delivery of general education.*

Proposals: What we offer now are two different ways to present our current general education program. Each approaches the organization of the elements differently while attempting to offer a cohesive program that can be understood and explained by faculty, students, and staff. We have embedded the plans in a revised version of the “framing language” we presented to you earlier in the semester.

You will also see some revisions of how current requirements are organized. Two revisions to how the elements are presented came from the units themselves: social sciences and religion. A third comes from the committee. We are suggesting that both elements of the Perspectives on Diversity be allowed to “double dip.” This is in response to the strong desire to remove confusing aspects of the program and to acknowledge how far the departmental curriculums have come in embedding this important content into their regular course offerings. The committee also suggests that some version of the Diversity in the Core Committee be reconstituted to consider other possible changes to this requirement and to help with ongoing faculty development and programming opportunities connected to these courses.

The committee has also wrestled with the idea of a distributive model with embedded themes. With a smaller student body and a less complex overall curriculum, we might have had success with this approach. However, doing themes well at PLU would take an investment in faculty development and program oversight that is currently out of reach. A truly thematic program would have very high transition costs, as well as ongoing development and oversight costs. Additionally, it would stress some units as they try to deliver enough sections of courses that work in particular themes while maintaining the integrity of their major and minor programs.

That said, we do believe we can begin to explore the idea of a thematic approach in the general education program by a strategic investment in the First-Year Experience Program. We do know that PLU’s investment in this program has paid off in student satisfaction and retention and has placed us at the forefront of the field of First-Year pedagogy and curriculum. To this end, the First-Year Experience Program is moving forward with a proposal.

Conclusion: We would like to see the PLU community embrace a cohesive general education program and invest in ongoing conversation about the goals, objectives, and pedagogies appropriate to the various elements. Our proposals focus primarily on changes in the articulation and explanation of the program. We believe this is a significant and vitally important step forward for PLU. We also propose a few changes to the elements of the general education program. It is our sincerest hope that we will all continue what has truly become a strong campus-wide conversation about general education—its goals, its contribution to the overall PLU education, and its specific relationship to all of the majors and minors we offer.